



Strangling Our Souls

by Dale Fincher

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"Muzak" is the noise we hear on the telephone after an operator puts us on hold. It is also called "elevator music," though most elevators I've taken in recent memory had no music. But the elevator music of our day pumps through the walls and ceilings of shopping malls, airplanes, airports, and even our own homes. The supply of music seems endless, though this may be only in part because we do not actually pause long enough to know we have encountered the same songs before.

Journalist Mike Zwerin of the International Herald Tribune put it this way, "Walk into just about any public urban space - supermarkets, restaurants, sports stadiums, airports - and you will hear the aggressive sonic wallpaper known as background music - the increasingly inescapable soundtrack of our lives." (1) He concludes that our Western culture has been "murdering silence with bad music."

This is not the only way we have murdered silence. Malcolm Muggeridge coined the phrase "Newzak" to reference all the meaningless news that airs on video screens everywhere we go. It is not really news intended to be watched with the full faculties of the brain. It is mostly entertainment that parades itself with flashy colors and modes of immediacy. In reality, ignoring Newzak is like avoiding used bubblegum on a Manhattan sidewalk—we hardly feel the loss. Yet the noise still remains, even if we ignore it.

The virus of noise in our culture has been a daily habit. How many of us actually leave the car stereo off during our daily commute? I believe for many of us, to drive in silence is an unknown torture that causes our inner life to squirm.

I remember the time when thieves stole the stereo from my automobile. I drove for six weeks without any sound in my car. And though I was unable to listen to some noble music, including classical and Christian, the silence broke the habit of noise in my life. It was a solace. The quiet in my car became a sudden vacation.

What does this mean for the human soul (especially one that believes Jesus rose from the dead and has opened up a new way of life for us)? What does this really mean for a soul that is supposed to walk in peace with God, listening to the subtleties of the Holy Spirit and the still voice of God? I think the noise, no matter how "spiritual" it is, can sometimes hinder us from attending to the most important thing. Murdering silence may be strangling our souls.

I believe one reason why many of us are addicted to perpetual noise is that we do not want to hear the cry of our own souls. The fear, resentment, dishonesty, or selfishness may be so loud on the inside we try to drown it out with noise from the outside. Meanwhile, Christ continues to call us: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:28-29 ESV).

How different our lives may be if we silenced our souls with Christ's rest rather than perpetual noise! The Psalmist admonishes us, "When you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent." This discipline of silence is like flowing water to a desert

heart. May God meet you today as you choose to find silence and still your soul with open ears.

- (1) Mike Zwerin, "Murdering Silence with Bad Music," (International Herald Tribune, Dec 29, 2004).

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